

PRESS RELEASE

SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA, COUNTY OF KERN

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 5, 2006

CONTACT:

Kathleen A. Kress
Court Projects Analyst
(661) 868-2602
Kathleen.Kress@kern.courts.ca.gov

**COURT LAUNCHES COMMUNITY MEDIATION PROGRAM
TO ASSIST SELF-REPRESENTED LITIGANTS**

Court patrons with small claims, eviction or civil harassment cases may now seek help from a community mediator before their case reaches final judgment. Effective immediately, trained mediators are available on-site at 1415 Truxtun Avenue, Bakersfield, to help parties design a settlement that best meets their needs.

The court offers this new service via contract with the Better Business Bureau Mediation Center of Kern County, funded by a portion of civil filing fees. Use of this service is entirely voluntary, at no charge to participants. Bilingual English/Spanish mediators are available.

Mediators are available before or after a court case has been filed. Before initiating a case, parties are encouraged to contact the BBB Mediation Center at (661) 616-5252 or (800) 675-8118 X300. Mediators will call the other parties involved and try to work out a settlement by phone. Early resolution via mediation eliminates the need to pay court filing fees, and saves several trips to the courthouse.

Mediators are also available any time after a case has been filed, up to the day of the court hearing. They will be present in the courtroom before scheduled hearings, when the judge makes a final pitch to encourage parties to work with the mediator and reach their own settlement. If mediation at this last juncture proves unsuccessful, parties maintain the right to a court hearing and a ruling by the judge.

"The partnership between the Better Business Bureau and the Superior Court will provide another alternative for consumers to timely resolve their disputes," said Terry McNally, Court Executive Officer. "This mediation alternative has a proven track record in other areas of California, and we are hopeful that it will prove to be just as successful in Kern."

This service is part of the court's ongoing efforts to provide assistance to self-represented litigants. For more information, contact Kathleen Kress, Court Project Analyst, at (661) 868-2602.

#####